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On Human Rights Day, Remember Cyprus

Human Rights Day on December 10 marks the 61st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration sets a standard for the way we treat one another around the world, challenges discrimination, and, more broadly, ensures respect for human rights.

As we mark Human Rights Day, much of the focus will be on those nations in Africa, Asian and the Middle East with the worst records on human rights. But it's important to note that human rights violations occur everywhere.

For more than 36 years, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Cyprus have been violated as a result of the Turkish invasion of 1974 and the continuous military occupation of more than one-third of the island. Prior to the invasion, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had co-existed peacefully for centuries. However, with the 1974 invasion, which was in violation of all rules of international legality, including the United Nations (UN) Charter, Turkey proceeded to occupy the northern part of the island and expel nearly all Greek Cypriot inhabitants from that region.

Ankara continues to pursue a policy of moving Turkish settlers to the occupied area in an effort to change the demographic composition of the island. The transfer of people by an occupying power of its own population to the area it occupies is considered a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions. Illegal settlers now outnumber Turkish Cypriots by almost two to one.

The people of Cyprus are victims of human rights violations, a fact which has been affirmed by UN resolutions and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In its judgment of the case Cyprus v. Turkey on May 10, 2001, the European Court of Human Rights found that there were massive and grave violations of 14 Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the missing persons and their relatives, the home and property rights of displaced persons and the living conditions of Greek Cypriots in the occupied northern part of Cyprus.

Currently, talks are underway between the President of Cyprus, Demetris Christofias, and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Dervis Eroglu, to find a solution to the Cyprus Problem. The agreed framework for a solution is a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, with a single sovereignty, single international personality and single

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citizenship and political equality as described in the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and with its independence and territorial integrity safeguarded.

As we honor Human Rights Day, it is important to remember that the best solution for Cyprus is to restore and safeguard the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Cypriots, including the right of return, the right to property for the refugees and the full and effective investigation of the fate of all missing persons.

*This material is being distributed by Qorvis Communications on behalf of the Embassy of the Republic of Cyprus.
Additional information is available at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.*

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